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Nehemiah 3:1-5

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 8

“Examining Our Gates: Jesus & Evangelism”

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In the first of a series on the Gates of Jerusalem, Pastor Gary looks at the gates of Jesus and Evangelism.

Ancient city gates were more than just points of entry or exit. They served to be a very strategic center of life where elders gathered to settle disputes and plan for war; where trade occurred; where court was held; where a number of things transpired. Each gate was named and each gate had a purpose. These purposes have a modern parallel for us today. With that in mind, Pastor Gary will be teaching a series of messages about “examining the gates of our lives.”

Historical Background

1. Nehemiah went out at night because this was a deeply personal and private mission from the Lord.
2. He had not told anyone about the things the Lord was calling him to do.
 - a. **Nehemiah 2:12** - *“I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.”*
3. Pastor Gary encouraged us to remember Nehemiah’s example and recognize that there will be times in our lives when the time has not yet come to share what the Lord has put on our heart.
 - a. Pray it; don’t say it!
 - b. Internalize it; don’t publicize it!

4. When the time was right, Nehemiah told the people why he was there and all that the Lord had put on his heart, and they responded positively.
 - a. [Nehemiah 2:17-18](#) - *“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work.”*
5. There are 10 gates mentioned in the book of Nehemiah, and each one had a purpose and a name.
6. The purpose of each gate translates to a modern parallel concerning things we need to be careful about in our own lives, both individually and as a local church.
7. Ancient city gates were important for many reasons.
 - a. The city gates were important for defense.
 - i. The weakest point of any ancient city was its gates.
 - ii. It was a disgrace to be a defenseless people.
 - b. Merchants set up shop at the city gates, and all kinds of business was transacted there.
 - i. The old saying about prime real estate was true of the city gates: “Location, location, location!”
 - c. Elders held court at the city gates.
 - d. Criminals were executed at the city gates.
 - e. War strategies were planned at the city gates.
 - i. Jesus made an allegorical reference to city gates when he said in [Matthew 16:18](#), *“the gates of Hades [Hell] will not overcome [the church].”*
 - ii. Jesus was speaking about how the darkest, most demonic strategies against the Church would not prevail, referring to the place where war strategies were planned.
8. There was a methodical pattern to the rebuilding of the gates, and the first gate to be rebuilt was the Sheep Gate.
 - a. The gates around the city were repaired and rebuilt going in a counterclockwise direction, starting from the Sheep Gate.

The Sheep Gate

9. **Nehemiah 3:1-2** - *“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.”*
10. Every worshipper who came to Jerusalem to offer a lamb of sacrifice at the Temple was required to go through the Sheep Gate.
 - a. The reason the priests rebuilt this gate was because of its sacred significance.

Atonement - Old Testament

11. Atonement is the process of being reconciled to the Lord or becoming “at-one” with Lord.
 - a. One way of explaining the meaning of atonement is to remember it as “at-one-ment” or at peace or in right relationship with God.
 - b. For centuries people brought their sacrifices to the Sheep Gate, until, when the time was right, God sent his son Jesus into the world to be the perfect sacrifice for all people, for all time.
 - c. The concept of atonement hasn’t changed, in that there must be a shedding of blood or an innocent life for a guilty life, for the forgiveness of sin; what has changed is the methodology.

Atonement - Jesus

12. Jesus, in the great exchange, became the innocent life sacrificed for the guilty.
 - a. **1 Peter 3:18a** - *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”*
 - b. **1 John 4:10** - *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*
 - c. **John 1:29** - *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”*
 - d. **1 Corinthians 5:7b** - *“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”*
 - e. **Isaiah 53:7** - *“... [Jesus] was led like a lamb to the slaughter...”*

- f. **Revelation 5:12** - *"In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'"*
- g. In the book of Revelation, Jesus used the word Lamb as the title for himself 31 times!
- h. **John 10:7, 9** - *"... I [Jesus] tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved..."*

Atonement - Today

- 13. Many people in our day believe that all religions are the same; there are just different ways to get to God, meaning there are many ways to be saved.
- 14. The message we hear in the world today is that all you need to do is be a good enough person, and you'll be "good to go!"
- 15. Jesus eliminated all of the various paths and human efforts to get to God, by making an exclusive claim that he was the only way to God.
 - a. **John 14:6** - *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (Emphasis added)*
- 16. In keeping with the theme of ever changing, never changing, Cornerstone Chapel has always and will always teach that Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved, so that as many people as possible can hear the truth, receive truth, believe the truth, and be saved!
- 17. Pastor Gary said, "People are free to reject the claims of Christ, and even dismiss him as a lunatic - which would be tragic - but you cannot accept the claims of Jesus and also believe in multiple paths to God, [because that] is inconsistent with what he [said]. You are duplicitous in your thinking if you believe that you can accept what Jesus [said], in part, but also believe that there are multiple ways to get to God. Neither can you accept what Jesus [said] a little bit and reject the other parts, because then you make [Jesus] out to be a liar. Jesus [made] exclusive claims. Truth is exclusive, and we will continue, no matter how the world [may] look at us as being narrow-minded or shortsighted or whatever, [regarding] the way to be saved. The way to be saved is open to all. The arms of Jesus are extended to all, but there is one way, and that way is Jesus. And we will always proclaim that way, that people might come to faith in Jesus Christ."

The Fish Gate

18. **Nehemiah 3:3** – *“The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.”*
19. This gate was to be used exclusively by fishermen to bring their fish to market.
 - a. Fish was the staple of the Jewish diet in this region in Jesus’ day.
 - b. There are 19 native fish in the Sea of Galilee, and the most common and prolific fish is Tilapia, which is also known as St. Peter’s Fish.
 - c. In a good year, Israeli fishermen bring in 250 tons of Tilapia!
20. Four, and as many as seven, of Jesus’ Disciples were fishermen.
 - a. The Bible tells us that Peter, his brother Andrew, plus James and his brother John, were fishermen.
 - b. **Matthew 4:18–20** – *“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.”*
21. Jesus was telling them that there was something more important for them to do than just making a living; he was telling them they needed to make a life, and part of that new life included them being fishers of people, and bringing people into the kingdom.
22. The Fish Gate reminds us that when we become followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to go out and gather other followers to Jesus Christ.
23. **Matthew 28:19** – *“... go and make disciples of all nations...”*
24. There is both a responsibility and a privilege each of us has when it comes to being fishermen and fisherwomen for the Lord!
25. **Matthew 13:47–50** – *“ ‘Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”*

26. It isn't our responsibility to save people - only the Lord can save a person - nor is it our responsibility to sort out the righteous from the unrighteous; it is our responsibility to cast the net.

27. We are to cast the net and let the Lord do the saving and the sorting!

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Nehemiah 2:11-20](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they've had when they prematurely announced something the Lord had put on their heart.
4. Read and discuss [Nehemiah 2:17-18](#).
5. What can we expect the difference to be when we prematurely announce something the Lord is doing instead of waiting until the time is right?
6. How difficult has it been for you to practice patience, and, as Pastor Gary said: "Pray it; don't say it" or "Internalize it; don't publicize it"?
7. Provide an overview of the theological understanding of what atonement means.
8. Read and discuss the Scriptures that demonstrate that Jesus is our atonement. (See #12 above)
9. What are some examples of experiences you've had when people share their thoughts about "being a good enough person" to hopefully make it heaven some day?
10. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the claims of Jesus. (See #17 above)
11. On a scale of 1 - 10, how would you rate yourself as a fisherman or fisherwoman for the Lord?

12. In what ways are you intentionally casting the net and gathering in all kinds of fish, so to speak?
13. Does the fact that we do not have the responsibility to save people or sort out the righteous from the unrighteous, free you to be more intentional about “net casting”?
14. Read and discuss [Matthew 13:47-50](#), and focus on the fact that the unsaved will be forever separated from the Lord, unless they hear the truth, receive the truth, believe the truth, and come to faith in Christ.
15. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).